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A FASTIDIOUS PRISONER ✓

BY

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A REPLY TO

“COLD CHEER AT CAMP MORTON.”

A work of fiction in the *April Century*

[Reprinted from Boston *Traveller*, Cleveland *Leader*, Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, Indianapolis *Journal*, New Haven *Paladium*, and other journals in which it appeared simultaneously.]

BOSTON :

3 SOMERSET STREET.

“ Ez fer war, I call it murder, —
Ther you hev it plain and flat ;
I don't want to go no fuder
Than my Testyment fer that.”

LOWELL. — *The Biglow Papers.*

“ The land that is not worth our death
Is not worth living for.”

“ In the good time coming
Nations shall not quarrel.”

“ War, that mad game the world so loves to play.”

“ Thank God ! the fathers need not blush to own the
sons to-day ” (1861).

“ There was war in the skies ! ”

“ At the wars, do as they do at wars.”

“ War is as ancient as human nature.”

“ Civil war is a hideous and repugnant thing.”

“ Cæsar's spirit raging for revenge.”

“ Farwell ! Othello's occupation's gone.”

“ Not one can choose his attitude of doing.”

“ The worthy cause has triumphed.”

“ The cruel war is over.”

“ War wins an awful glory.”

“ Hurrah ! sheathe your swords ! we have won ! we
have won ! ”

"COLD CHEER" INDEED.

A FASTIDIOUS REBEL PRISONER OBJECTS TO YANKEE TREATMENT.

He Complains that Camp Morton Lacked
the Usual Comforts of Home.

FROM luxurious apartments on Madison avenue, a professional gentleman, a Confederate soldier, a prisoner at Indianapolis in 1864, writes a work of fiction for the April *Century*, under the title, "Cold Cheer at Camp Morton."

Both the adjectives and illustrations are chosen for their effect, rather than for their relation to fact. If the article were sure to be carefully read, there would be no occasion to reply to it, for it furnishes its own internal evidence of unreliability. For twenty-five years the writer has undoubtedly been giving private rehearsals

of prison experiences, enlarging upon them as his imagination broadened and intensified, until at last he has gone into print, *more anxious to live up to his oral versions than to keep within the bounds of reason*. Upon this theory only can one account for such a story. When the adjectives and the overstatements are eliminated, this recital of "Cold Cheer" is little more than a petulant complaint that as prisoners of war they were not feasted and fêred as distinguished guests. All that we ask is that it be read with the distinct understanding that its author writes of war times; that he was a prisoner of war, and was fed and clothed by the government.

He makes four general charges: *abusive treatment, cruelty, starvation, and freezing to death*. He bases the charge of abusive treatment upon the fact that prisoners were sometimes struck because they would not cease talking when an officer was passing. It is a matter of official report that it was practically impossible for an officer to go through the camp without being

insulted. It was more difficult to discipline the prison in this regard than it was our own camp. The prisoners would stroll near the sentry and mutter epithets, for which, if spoken under other circumstances, they would have been immediately chastised. I recall a Sunday when they were holding open-air services. The preacher, in a prolonged prayer, plied anathemas so "thick and fast," amid jubilant "Amens," that I asked for authority to see that he ceased *praying to be heard of men*. This was not granted, and he continued to shout his abuse of the soldiers, officers, Yankee land, and the President. I never knew a case in which a man was slapped in the face for it, but I knew a thousand men who were ready for such a fray. I presume some men yielded to the provocation when officers or visitors were insulted. Suffice it to say that the abuse was provoked.

The charge of cruelty is broadly made. But the writer admits that the most barbarous act of cruelty was perpetrated by himself. According to his story, there

were some fellows among the prisoners who would eat from the hospital swill barrel. Patients were allowed some luxuries denied the other prisoners. Uneaten portions went into the swill. Finding a fellow who had yielded to this temptation, Wyeth and a few companions *ducked him head foremost in the hospital swill barrel*. This was by far the most heartless and indecent thing ever done in the history of Camp Morton, and this *Century* article has revealed for the first time the name of one of the perpetrators of this outrage. It was "cold cheer," indeed, for one prisoner.

Here are some of the gravest charges of cruelty :—

Arrived at Camp Morton at 10 o'clock P. M. in early October, where, "*no provision having been made for us, we slept, or tried to sleep, through the cold night in the open air upon the ground.*" Well, well! What did he expect? Speak out, Grand Army boys, and recite the instances in which you have arrived at camp where no provision had been made

for you. Did you ever sleep, or try to sleep, through an early October night in the open air upon the ground? Why, you could fairly make his blood curdle by reciting your experiences!

He was taken with a chill in the morning, could not be admitted to the hospital till two o'clock in the afternoon, and was given a bed upon which a man had died. This may be a strange experience for a Southern soldier, but it was common enough with the "boys in blue." The incoming of a large number of unexpected guests, who had not sent on notice of their physical condition, might naturally surprise a hospital: and a few hours of waiting in the middle of the day by a person not wounded, who simply complained of a chill, will hardly be accepted as cruelty by the average Union soldier. Unfortunately, it was not the custom of the Union army to destroy the couches upon which men chanced to die. It is evident that the authorities did not realize what a fastidious youth they had on hand.

The camp had been a fair ground, the stables of which were used as barracks. These were shingled, he admits, and did not leak, but there was no floor. This was a grave omission! It was simply cruel for the United States government not to floor the spare chamber in which it was entertaining distinguished guests; but in that day the æsthetic nature was not developed in the "wild and woolly West," as at present. The sides of the building were not clapboarded, but were battened, and on one occasion there was a draft. A careful examination of the official records shows that no complaint was ever made of this draft, so that the government is really not responsible for allowing such exposure.

"The entrance was through a large barn door at each end." As there was an abundance of room to pass out and in, there could be no objection to this, except from the æsthetic standpoint.

There were four tiers of bunks, the lowest one foot from the ground, the second three feet above that, and the third

three feet higher. As this is precisely the height from the floor and the space allowed in *a Pullman palace car*,—for which we pay two dollars a night,—we incline to think this charge should be turned over to some modern reformatory society.

“No straw for bedding.” Come, “boys in blue,” speak up. Aren’t you ashamed to think of a “boy in gray” being forced to spend a night in a bunk without straw? Why didn’t you share your luxurious bedding with this tender youth? Let everyone who luxuriated on straw, feathers, or a hair mattress at once send a note of apology for such a lack of hospitality. I know one regiment, at least, which would have been willing to give him all the straw it ever had.

“Each man was allowed but one blanket.” Cruel boys! why did you not give him some of your spare blankets? But possibly, like a regiment I knew, you had but one blanket each, which had to serve as bed and coverlet.

“There were but four stoves to each

barraek." I have heard of barracks in which *one* would have been a luxury. To think that these guests had but four stoves is the depth of humiliation. I never heard anything like it. *If he will go to Indianapolis now, he will stand a chance of a warmer reception.*

He paid fifteen cents for an ear of corn! Now, I paid twenty-five cents for an ear of corn, and was right glad to get it at that; but that doesn't count, for I was a Union soldier, and was not expected to receive the same treatment as our guests. If we could find out who was so discourteous as to charge anything, we would punish him by some mild process. We could hardly have the heart to "duck him head-foremost in a hospital swill barrel."

"Our letters were scanned at the camp post-office." This is not an uncommon prison experience in times of peace, and needs no comment.

"Jewelry was stolen from our mail." This was indeed cruel. It is too much to believe. If he can identify the wretch, we will try to have him court-martialled,

even at this late day, for it was a "cruel" thing to steal jewelry from the mail of a prisoner of war. There was never such a charge made regarding Andersonville, Libby, or Belle Isle.

"We were forced to dig a ditch to prevent ourselves from escaping." I have no language with which to express my indignation at such cruelty. We would have dug it ourselves, had we realized how it was going to sound twenty-five years later, when the *Century* presented it in such "Cold Cheer."

The fence was twenty feet high and smooth, and the sentries were upon the parapet outside, and the prisoners could only see their heads and shoulders. The lamps were so placed that the sentries could see the prisoners, but it was with difficulty that the prisoners could see the sentries, and their beats were so arranged that there was never more than 150 feet unguarded at one time.

These are, indeed, grave charges. The fence ought not to have been more than six feet high, should not have been smooth,

and the sentries should certainly have had more than their head and shoulders exposed. The lamps ought certainly to have been faced the other way, so that sentries could have been seen while they could not see. It would seem as though a hundred and fifty feet was as much unguarded parapet as could have been reasonably asked; but, of course, that is a matter of taste.

One man, having successfully scaled this smooth, twenty-foot fence, despite the lamp, wrote to his comrades that he was all right in Kentucky. This tempted seven others to try it. "Four brave fellows," of these seven, were captured, and they were placed with their backs against a tree, their arms extended above their heads, and there they had to stand through the night. He waxes eloquent upon this terrible cruelty. It was, indeed, unkind not to put them in bed and carefully nurse them, so that they would have strength to make a successful break the next time. He describes in detail the chivalric way these "brave fellows"

treated the sentry. Some forty picked men organized themselves for escape and made ladders, "*armed themselves with stones, pieces of wood, and bottles,*" and "*made a rush, pelted the sentries,* and the entire assaulting party gained the outside. Some few men were recaptured, but the majority reached Canada or the South." I was on guard that night, and shall never forget our indignation that no punishment was meted out to the "brave fellows" of *stone, wood, and bottle fame* who were recaptured.

A detail composed of prisoners was selected to accompany the garbage wagon to some distant point outside the walls. Five persons at a preconcerted signal seized the two guards, disarmed them, and escaped. At another time two men "were mortally wounded by a ball, the assassin doing his work so well that the same ball passed through both bodies." Upon this he dwells with unusual bitterness. It was a "brave fellow" always who *threw stones, wood, and bottles*, who seized and bound the guard; it was an *assassin*

always who objected to being bound.

As to the general charge of starvation. He says they had daily a dish of vegetable soup, a loaf of bread, seven inches long and three and a half deep and wide, and a piece of meat. On this diet, he says, multitudes starved to death, and were always so hungry that a rat or dog could not come within reach without being killed and eaten. There is no accounting for taste. If a man with a full loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a dish of vegetable soup desired rats and dogs for dessert, it is no concern of ours; but when he says that men were starving to death upon such diet, we decline to revolutionize the history of a quarter of a century upon such testimony.

The remaining charge is that multitudes froze to death. Not that they were cold or uncomfortable, but literally *froze to death*. The camp was in a grove, and was inclosed by a close fence twenty feet high. They were all quartered in barracks; each having four stoves; each man with a blanket. He says that each four

men formed a combine, using one blanket under them and three over them, and then *they froze to death!* He saw eighteen frozen to death one morning!! No imagination in this, of course. No enlargement of the facts in twenty-five years?

That same night the sentry was walking upon a bleak parapet, twenty feet in the air. In the howling wind, blinding snow, or stinging cold, as the case might be, he had not a single blanket in that exposed place, and yet he never froze so much as an ear.

There used to be some tall swearing done by the sentries on those nights, as, in their loneliness, they braved the weather, while the prisoners were comfortably freezing to death, shut in by the high fence, amply protected by the barracks, with four stoves, and under three blankets.

If anybody cares to believe that eighteen prisoners froze to death under these circumstances, he is welcome to his faith in the "Cold Cheer" story. We have no interest in the opinion of any man who

can read that article and believe that there was much unjustifiable abuse or serious cruelty, who can believe that one man ever starved or froze to death. In one respect "Cold Cheer" is cheering. What a world of possibilities it opens up to the Union soldiers. All that is needed is *a few years for the play of the imagination to do its perfect work*, as it has done in the case of the author of "Cold Cheer."

Thus much for the work of fiction as illuminated in the *Century*. Now a word as to the facts. General Henry B. Carrington of the regular army, a graduate of Yale, a scholarly gentleman, a thorough business man, was in command of the department of Indiana, and devoted himself faithfully and conscientiously to making Camp Morton a model prison camp, and his pride in his charge, if nothing else, would have prompted him to keep it in first-class condition, for it was constantly visited by the dignitaries. General Alvin P. Hovey, in an official report, September 4, 1865, says: "I repeatedly, with pride, conducted visi-

tors to Camp Morton to show the military discipline and the order and neatness that prevailed throughout the barracks and prison." It was scrupulously neat and every way comfortable for army life, but it may seem very cruel and non-aesthetic and insufficient to the gentleman, in his spacious Madison - avenue apartments. Why, it seems cruel to some of the Union soldiers to think of having but thirteen dollars a month for self and home.

General Carrington, in a detailed official report of July 2, 1866, says: "In 1863-4, when daily visits to every camp were necessary, *this* duty was of the most exacting kind. More than eleven thousand men were in camp at one time. They had to be fed and mainly clothed." From copies of his official correspondence at the time, it appears the barracks used by prisoners were *first used by our own troops*. When the prisoners arrived, *these barracks were given to the prisoners, and the Union soldiers* occupied tents and temporary sheds. The barracks occupied by the prisoners — "barn doors" and all — were every way

the same as those occupied by the Union soldiers.

The only instance in which there was any uncleanness or raggedness was at the time of an unusual influx of prisoners after the fall of Donaldson. The men were in a terrible condition — broken down physically, ragged, uncleanly, pale, hungry, even emaciated. The death rate following their arrival was large, due partly to *previous starvation*. The attention given to their comfort and health by the officers and troops was as great as it could have been for the “boys in blue.” Hospital tents were pitched, and, as by magic, plastered buildings were erected for them.

There was never a day, even under the greatest pressure, that the food was not wholesome and of full quantity. I well remember the attention shown Colonel Morgan and his party. They requested to be by themselves, and were given tents with flies, and, at their request, *oyster stew was furnished for supper upon the evening of their arrival*. The prisoners

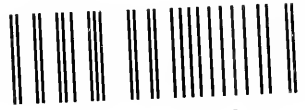
always had as good food as our troops, slightly lighter in quantity, because they did no duty.

I was at Camp Morton a few months since. It is a fair ground once more. Beautiful horses are stabled there. Each has corn, for which he does not pay fifteen cents an ear: each has one blanket, and straw upon which to lie. There are no end "barn doors" to his barracks: there is no draft, and there is a floor to his spare chamber. He does not have the mail inspected, and no jewelry is ever withheld. His camp is kept scrupulously neat, and he never has to go with the garbage wagon. He never eats rats or dogs, and is never ducked head foremost in the hospital swill barrel.

Looking upon these sleek animals, I said, "What a contrast between the way these dumb animals are housed, fed, and petted and the way the Union soldiers lived!" It was a cruel war, but we all fared well for army life, and the prisoners at Camp Morton fared luxuriously for prisoners of war.



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